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**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee**

**Wednesday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**4:00 PM in Room 2C of the LOB**

My name is George Logan, Chair of the State of Connecticut African American Affairs Commission.

I come before you on behalf of not only the Commission on which I have proudly served for past 10 years, but more importantly on behalf of the approximately 328,516 African-Americans that live in Connecticut.

African Americans represent approximately 9.4 percent of the State's population. It is a proud and industrious community. There are some among us who have achieved the American Dream – who have successful careers with well-paying jobs, a nice home in a safe neighborhood with good schools. They are, at least for right now able to pay for their medical expenses, AND put food on the table. But for far too many Connecticut African Americans, this is not the case. Far too often, African Americans live in the Other Connecticut. The one not posted on billboards, or touted by the Commission on

Culture and Tourism. It is the Connecticut where far too many people go hungry, the Connecticut where a disproportionate number of people experiencing the negative effects of public policy are Black.

According to the Secretary of State's 2007 Statistical Report on Gender and Racial Composition of Connecticut State Boards and Commissions African Americans continue to be underrepresented as members of boards of our State's policy making agency's and institutions. Conversely, Connecticut's African American community is plagued by the overrepresentation in most of the least desirable socio-economic indices.

African-Americans have a nearly 40% high school drop out rate, but a nearly 44% participation rate in state prison incarceration. African-American children account for 44% percent of the state's detention center population.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, Connecticut has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest black to white incarceration ratio in the nation.

The asset poverty level of minorities in Connecticut is almost 4 times that of white families. The unemployment rate for African Americans is twice as high as their white counterparts. For working African Americans in Connecticut, the median hourly wage of \$14.44, is \$5.50 less than the median income earned by whites. (The median household income for the State's white households in is \$67,852 compared to \$41,648 for African American households.)<sup>2</sup>

Statewide, the homeownership rate among Blacks is 46%, while homeownership among whites is 72%.<sup>3</sup> African Americans are twice as likely to be rejected for conventional mortgages than whites, but twice as likely to be targeted for subprime home loans and other forms of predatory lending.

African Americans eagerly endeavor to participate in American enterprise, but of Connecticut's nearly 302,000 businesses, only 3.4% are owned by African Americans.

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<sup>1</sup> The Social State of Connecticut 12008. November 20, 2008 Edition. P. 67-78

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "2007 American Community Survey" *Selected Population Profile* "Black Alone" *Median Household Income Dollars*

<sup>3</sup> Freddie Mac. "Housing and Mortgage Statistics- Connecticut" Homeownership Rates by Race and Ethnicity.

The health status of the African American community is worse than any other racial or ethnic minority in the state.

In 2006, the African American infant mortality rate of 12.9 per 1,000 live births was more than 300% higher than infant mortality of whites statewide.<sup>4</sup> In Connecticut African Americans despite being 9.3 percent of the population are 30.2 % of the dialysis population.<sup>5</sup> And are at higher risk for the chronic diseases of diabetes, stroke, cancer, cardiovascular disease. Health disparities in this community persist. Nearly 45% of all newly infected people with HIV are African American.<sup>6</sup>

These statistics are indicative of the status, or lack thereof of African Americans in Connecticut. They are numbers that are attached to people, and it is this group of people that the African American Affairs Commission has been mandated to advocate for and protect. To that end the African American Affairs Commission has initiated and sustained programs that connect the African American community to State and community resources and to the agency administrators and legislative policy makers.

We have held statewide forums to inform our constituents on how to become part of the Reflecting Connecticut – the statewide Talent Bank to increase women and people of color on State Boards and Commissions. We are partnered with the State Departments of Education and Higher Education to work to improve school curricula, minority teacher recruitment and secondary school reform, with a special emphasis on underperforming schools.

The African American Affairs Commission, held forums to investigate the disparate treatment of Department of Corrections Employees and Coalition of Independent Taxi

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<sup>4</sup> The Social State of Connecticut 2008. November 20, 2008 Edition. P. 23-24

<sup>5</sup> The Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches Health Committee – “ A Health Status Report on African Americans in Connecticut”. *Health Coverage and Utilization*. Available from [http://research.yale.edu/datainitiative/reports/Health\\_Status\\_Report\\_AFAMCT.pdf](http://research.yale.edu/datainitiative/reports/Health_Status_Report_AFAMCT.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Connecticut Department of Public Health. “HIV/AIDS Surveillance Program” Estimating the number of people infected with HIV in 2006. Available from [http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dpl/aids\\_and\\_chronic/Surveillance/ctjovomcodemcefactsjeet\\_2008pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dpl/aids_and_chronic/Surveillance/ctjovomcodemcefactsjeet_2008pdf).

Drivers which led to further investigations by the Program Review and Investigation Committee. We work with the Commission on Children to ensure the provision of reducing childhood obesity and poverty, and with the Commission on Women to support pay equity and gender appropriate healthcare, mental health services and trafficking in persons. We work with the Department of Administrative Services, Office of the Secretary of State and the Connecticut Minority Supplier Development to increase participation of African-American entrepreneurs in State contracting and marketing opportunities.

The AAAC initiated a Memorandum of Understanding with the State Department of Public Health that marked the first of its kind to formalize communication between the two agencies for the purpose of improving health outcomes in the African American community. As a result of that alliance, the AAAC plays a vital role in establishing protocols for outreach and standards for culturally competent service delivery to communities of color through its active participation in a number of joint ventures including the Connecticut Multi-Cultural Health Partnership, Comprehensive Cancer Partnership, and Sexual Violence Prevention Partnership. Most recently the AAAC serves on the newly formed Commission on Health Equity (CHE) to help eradicate health disparities for all residents of the State.

Last but not least we are the point of contact, the helpful voice on the phone, for individuals from the African-American community and those seeking knowledge about Connecticut African-Americans who are searching for assistance and answers to questions, they seem unable to get elsewhere.

The work of the AAAC is vital not only to African Americans, but to the State as a whole. We are the connector between this vital and changing community. The AAAC is the voice of the people that seeks to bring impartial insight and information to the Legislature. Elimination of the African American Affairs Commission would destroy the State's ability to create informed and effective policy and would negatively impact the quality of life for all Connecticut residents.

This was rationale and basis upon which the State of Connecticut African American Affairs Commission was founded. It was the reason for which conscious and competent minds constructed a vehicle by which the African American community could gain access and achieve equity and those in positions of law and authority could become informed.

The current state of affairs of the vast majority of African Americans is proof that while some gaps are closing, others continue to persist. A return to a time without this Commission would be a return to an era of despair, ignorance and social destruction from which the State sought understanding and relief. The need for the African American Affairs Commission continues, as long as the need for fairness and equity exist in the African American community.